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THE HERMITAGE

AND

OTHER POEMS

BY

EDWARD ROWLAND SILL.



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POEMS.



I.

THE HERMITAGE.*

A LIFE,—a common, cleanly, quiet life,
Full of good citizenship and repute,
New, but with promise of prosperity,—
A well-bred, fair, young-gentlemanly life,—
What business had a girl to bring her eyes,
And her blonde hair, and her clear, ringing voice,
And break up life, as a bell breaks a dream?
Had Love Christ's wrath, and did this life sell doves
In the world's temple, that Love scourged it forth
Beyond the gates? Within, the worshippers,—
Without, the waste, and the hill-country, where
The life, with smarting shoulders and stung heart,
Unknowing that the hand which scourged could heal,
Drave forth, blind, cursing, in despair to die,
Or work its own salvation out in fear.

Old World—old, foolish, wicked World—farewell!

* California, Bay of San Francisco, 1866.

Since the Time-angel left my soul with thee,
Thou hast been a hard step-mother unto me.
Now I at last rebel
Against thy stony eyes and cruel hands.
I will go seek in far-off lands
Some quiet corner, where my years shall be
Still as the shadow of a brooding bird
That stirs but with her heart-beats. Far, unheard
May wrangle on the noisy human host,
While I will face my Life, that silent ghost,
And force it speak what it would have with me.

Not of the fair young Earth,
The snow-crowned, sunny-belted globe ;
Not of its skies, nor Twilight's purple robe,
Nor pearly dawn ; not of the flowers' birth,
And Autumn's forest-funerals ; not of storms,
And quiet seas, and clouds' incessant forms ;
Not of the sanctuary of the night,
With its solemnities, nor any sight
And pleasant sound of all the friendly day :
But I am tired of what we call our lives ;
'Tired of the endless humming in the hives,—
Sick of the bitter honey that we eat,
And sick of cursing all the shallow cheat.

Let me arise, and away
To the land that guards the dying day,
Whose burning tear, the evening-star,
Drops silently to the wave afar ;
The land where summers never cease
Their sunny psalm of light and peace.
Whose moonlight, poured for years untold,
Has drifted down in dust of gold ;
Whose morning splendors, fallen in showers,
Leave ceaseless sunrise in the flowers.

There I will choose some eyrie in the hills,
Where I may build, like a lonely bird,
And catch the whispered music heard
Out of the noise of human ills.

So, I am here at last ;
A purer world, whose feet the old, salt Past[†]
Washes against, and leaves it fresh and free
As a new island risen from the sea.

Three dreamy weeks we lay on Ocean's breast,
Rocked asleep, by gentle winds caressed,
Or crooned with wild wave-lullabies to rest.

A memory of foam and glassy spray ;
Wave chasing wave, like young sea-beasts at play ;
Stretches of misty silver 'neath the moon,
And night-airs murmuring many a quiet tune.
Three long, delicious weeks' monotony
Of sky, and stars, and sea,
Broken midway by one day's tropic scene
Of giant plants, tangles of luminous green,
With fiery flowers and purple fruits between.

I have found a spot for my hermitage,—
No dank and sunless cave,—
I come not for a dungeon, nor a cage,—
Not to be Nature's slave,
But, as a weary child,
Unto the mother's faithful arms I flee,
And seek the sunniest footstool at her knee,
Where I may sit beneath caresses mild,
And hear the sweet old songs that she will sing to
me.

'Tis a grassy mountain-nook,
In a gorge, whose foaming brook
Tumbles through from the heights above,
Merrily leaping to the light

From the pine-wood's haunted gloom,—
As a romping child,
Affrighted, from a sombre room
Leaps to the sunshine, laughing with delight :
Be this my home, by man's tread undefiled.
Here sounds no voice but of the mourning dove,
Nor harsher footsteps on the sands appear
Than the sharp, slender hoof-marks of the deer,
Or where the quail has left a zizzag row
Of lightly-printed stars her track to show.

Above me frowns a front of rocky wall,
Deep cloven into ruined pillars tall
And sculptures strange ; bald to its dizzy edge,
Save where, in some deep crevice of a ledge
Buttressed by its black shadow hung below,
A solitary pine has cleft the rock,—
Straight as an arrow, feathered to the tip,
As if a shaft from the moon-huntress' bow
Had struck and grazed the cliff's defiant lip,
And stood, still stiffly quivering with the shock.

Beyond the gorge a slope runs half-way up,
With hollow curve as for a giant's cup,

Brimming with blue pine-shadows : then in air
The gray rock rises bare,
Its front deep-fluted by the sculptor-storms
In moulded columns, rounded forms,
As if great organ-pipes were chiselled there,
Whose anthems are the torrent's roar below,
And chanting winds that through the pine-tops go.
Here bursts of requiem music sink and rise,
When the full moonlight, slowly streaming, lies
Like panes of gold on some cathedral pave,
While floating mists their silver incense wave,
And from on high, through fleecy window-bars,
Gaze down the saintly faces of the stars.

Against the huge trunk of a storm-snapped tree,
(Whose hollow, ready-hewn by long decay,
Above, a chimney, lined with slate and clay,
Below, a broad-arched fireplace makes for me,)
I've built of saplings and long limbs a hut.
The roof with lacing boughs is tightly shut,
Thatched with thick-spreading palms of pine,
And tangled over by a wandering vine,
Uprooted from the woods close by,
Whose clasping tendrils climb and twine,
Waving their little hands on high,

As if they loved to deck this nest of mine.
Within, by smooth white stones from the brook's beach
My rooms are separated, each from each.
On yonder island-rock my table's spread,
Brook-ringed, that no stray, fasting ant may come
To make himself with my wild fare at home.

Here will I live, and here my life shall be
Serene, still, rooted steadfastly,
Yet pointing skyward, and its motions keep
A rhythmic balance, as that cedar tall,
Whose straight shaft rises from the chasm there,
Through the blue, hollow air,
And, measuring the dizzy deep,
Leans its long shadow on the rock's gray wall.

Through the sharp gap of the gorge below,
From my mountains' feet the gaze may go
Over a stretch of fields, broad-sunned,
Then glance beyond,
Across the beautiful bay,
To that dim ridge, a score of miles away,
Lifting its clear-cut outline high,
Azure with distance on the azure sky,

Whose flocks of white clouds brooding on its crests
Have winged from ocean to their piny nests.
Beyond the bright blue water's further rim,
Where waves seem ripples on its far-off brim,
The rich young city lies,
Diminished to an ant-hill's size.
I trace its steep streets, ribbing all the hill
Like narrow bands of steel,
Binding the city on the shifting sand :
Thick-pressed between them stand
Broad piles of buildings, pricked through here and
there
By a sharp steeple ; and above, the air
Murky with smoke and dust, that seem to show
The bright sky saddened by the sin below.

The voice of my wild brook is marvellous ;
Leaning above it from a jutting rock
To watch the image of my face, that forms
And breaks, and forms again (as the image of God
Is broken and re-gathered in a soul,)
I listen to the chords that sink and swell
From many a little fall and babbling run.
That hollow gurgle is the deepest base ;
Over the pebbles gush contralto tones,

While shriller trebles tinkle merrily,
Running, like some enchanted-fingered flute,
Endless chromatics.

Now it is the hum
And roar of distant streets ; the rush of winds
Through far-off forests : now the noise of rain
Drumming the roof ; the hiss of ocean-foam :
Now the swift ripple of piano-keys
In mad mazurkas, danced by laughing girls.

So, night and day, the hurrying brook goes on ;
Sometimes in noisy glee, sometimes far down,
Silent along the bottom of the gorge,
Like a deep passion hidden in the soul,
'That chafes in secret hunger for its sea :
Yet not so still but that heaven finds its course ;
And not so hid but that the yearning night
Broods over it, and feeds it with her stars.

When earth has Eden spots like this for man,
Why will he drag his life where lashing storms
Whip him indoors, the petulant weather's slave ?
There he is but a helpless, naked snail,
Except he wear his house close at his back.
Here the wide air builds him his palace walls,—

Some little corner of it roofed, for sleep ;
Or he can lie all night, bare to the sky,
And feel updrawn against the breast of heaven,
Letting his thoughts stretch out among the stars,
As the antennæ of an insect grope
Blindly for food, or as the ivy's shoots
Clamber from cope and tower to find the light,
And drink the electric pulses of the sun.

As from that sun we draw the coarser fire
That swells the veins, and builds the brain and bone,
So from each star a finer influence streams,
Kindling within the mortal chrysalis
The first faint thrills of its new life to come.

Here is no niggard gap of sky above,
With murk and mist below, but all sides clear,—
Not an inch bated from the full-swung dome ;
Each constellation to the horizon's rim
Keen-glittering, as if one only need
Walk to the edge there, spread his wings, and float,
The dark earth spurned behind, into the blue.

I love thee, thou brown, homely, dear old Earth !

Those fairer planets whither fate may lead,
Whatever marvel be their bulk or speed,
Ringed with what splendor, belted round with fire,
In glory of perpetual moons arrayed,
Can ne'er give back the glow and fresh desire
Of youth in that old home where man had birth,
Whose paths he trod through wholesome light and
shade.

Out of their silver radiance to thy dim
And clouded orb his eye will turn,
As an old man looks back to where he played
About his father's hearth, and finds for him
No splendor like the fires which there did burn.

See : I am come to live alone with thee.
Thou hast had many a one, grown old and worn,
Come to thee weary and forlorn,
Bent with the weight of human vanity.
But I come with my life almost untried,
In thy perpetual presence to abide.
Teach me thy wisdom ; let me learn the flowers,
And know the rocks and trees,
And touch the springs of all thy hidden powers.
Let the still gloom of thy rock-fastnesses

Fall deep upon my spirit, till the voice
Of brooks become familiar, and my heart rejoice
With joy of birds and winds ; and all the hours,
Unmaddened by the babble of vain men,
Bring thy most inner converse to my ken.
So shall it be, that, when I stand
On that next planet's ruddy-shimmering strand,
I shall not seem a pert and forward child
Seeking to dabble in abstruser lore
With alphabet unlearned, who in disgrace
Returns, upon his primer yet to pore—
But those examiners, all wise and mild,
Shall gently lead me to my place,
As one that faithfully did trace
These simpler earthly records o'er and o'er.

Beckoned at sunrise by the surf's white hand,
I have strayed down to sit upon the beach,
And hear the oratorio of the Sea.
On this steep, crumbling bank, where the high tides
Have crunched the earth away, a crooked oak—
A hunch-backed dwarf, whose limbs, cramped down
by gales,
Have twisted stiffening back upon themselves—
Spreads me a little arbor from the sun.

On the brown, shining beach, all ripple-carved,
Gleams now and then a pool ; so smooth and clear,
That, though I cannot see the plover there
Pacing its farther edge (so much he looks
The color of the sand), yet I can trace
His image hanging in the glassy brine—
Slim legs and rapier-beak—like silver-plate
With such a pictured bird clean-etched upon it.

Beyond, long curves of little shallow waves
Creep, tremulous with ripples, to the shore,
Till the whole bay seems slowly sliding in,
With edge of snow that melts against the sand.

Above its twinkling blue, where ceaselessly
The white curve of a slender arm of foam
Is reached along the water, and withdrawn,
A flock of sea-birds darken into specks ;
Then whiten, as they wheel with sunlit wings,
Winking and wavering against the sky.

The earth for form, the sea for coloring,
And overhead, fair daughters of the two,
The clouds, whose curves were moulded on the hills,
Whose tints of pearl and foam the ocean gave.

O Sea, thou art all beautiful, but dumb !
Thou hast no utterance articulate
For human ears ; only a restless moan
Of barren tides, that loathe the living earth
As alien, striving towards the barren moon.
Thou art no longer infinite to man :
Has he not touched thy boundary-shores, and now
Laid his electric fetters round thy feet ?
Thy dumb moan saddens me ; let me go back
And listen to the silence of the hills.

At last I live alone :
No human judgment-seats are here
Thrust in between man and his Maker's throne,
With praise to covet, or with frown to fear :
No small, distorted judgments bless, or blame ;
Only to Him I own
The inward sense of worth, or flush of shame.

God made the man alone ;
And all that first grand morning walked he so.
Then was he strong and wise, till at the noon,
When tired with joyous wonder he lay prone
For rest and sleep, God let him know
The subtile sweetness that is bound in Two.

Man rises best alone :
Upward his thoughts stream, like the leaping flame,
Whose base is tempest-blown ;
Upward and skyward, since from thence they came,
And thither they must flow.
But when in twos we go,
The lightnings of the brain weave to and fro,
Level across the abyss that parts us all ;
If upward, only slantwise, as we scale
Slowly together that night-shrouded wall
Which bounds our reason, lest our reason fail.
If linked in threes, and fives,
However heavenward the spirit strives,
The lowest stature draws the highest down,—
The king must keep the level of the clown.
The grosser matter has the greater power
In all attraction ; every hour
We slide and slip to lower scales,
Till weary aspiration fails,
And that keen fire which might have pierced the
 skies,
Is quenched and killed in one another's eyes.

A child had blown a bubble fair
That floated in the sunny air :

A hundred rainbows danced and swung
Upon its surface, as it hung
In films of changing color rolled,
Crimson, and amethyst, and gold,
With faintest streaks of azure sheen,
And curdling rivulets of green.
“If so the surface shines,” cried he,
“What marvel must the centre be !”
He caught it—on his empty hands
A drop of turbid water stands !

With men, to help the moments fly,
I tossed the ball of talk on high,
With glancing jest, and random stings,
Grazing the crests of thoughts and things,
In many a shifting ray of speech
That shot swift sparkles, each to each.
I thought, “Ah, could we pierce below
To inner soul, what depths would show !”
In friendships many, loves a few,
I pierced the inner depths, and knew
’Twas but the shell that splendor caught :
Within, one sour and selfish thought.

I found a grotto, hidden in the gorge,
Paved by the brook in rare Mosaic work
Of sand, and lucent depths, and shadow-streaks
Veining the amber of the sun-dyed wave.
Between two mossy masses of gray rock
Lay a clear basin, which, with sun and shade
Bewitched, a great transparent opal made,
Over whose broken rims the water ran.
Above each rocky side leaned waving trees
Whose lace of branches wove a restless roof,
Trailed over by green vines that sifted down
A dust of sunshine through the chilly shade.

Leaning against a trunk of oak, rock-wedged,
Whose withen roots were clenched upon the stones,
I was a Greek, and caught the sudden flash
Of a scared Dryad's vanishing robe, and heard
The laughter, half-suppressed, of hiding Fauns.
Up the dark stairway of the tumbling stream
The sun shot through, and struck each foamy fall
Into a silvery veil of dazzling fire.
Along its shady course, the tossing drops
By some swift sunbeam ever caught, were lit,
To sparkling stars, that fell, and flashed, and fell,
Incessantly rekindled. Bubble-troops

Came dancing by, to break just at my feet ;
Lo ! every bubble mirrored the whole scene—
The streak of blue between the roofing-boughs,
And on it my own face in miniature
Quaintly distorted, as if some small elf
Peered up at me beneath his glassy dome.

If men but knew the mazes of the brain
And all its crowded pictures, they would need
No Louvre or Vatican : behind our brows
Intricate galleries are built, whose walls
Are rich with all the splendors of a life.
Each crimson leaf of every autumn walk,
Dewdrops of childhood's mornings, every scene
From any window where we've chanced to stand,
Forgotten sunsets, summer afternoons,
Hang fresh in those immortal galleries.
Few ever can unlock them, till great Death
Unrolls our life-long memory as a scroll.
One key is solitude, and silence one,
And one a quiet mind, content to rest
In God's sufficiency, and take His world,
Not dabbling all the Master's work to death
With our small interference. God is God.

Yet we must give the children leave to use
Our garden-tools, though they spoil tool and plant
In learning. So the Master may not scorn
Our awkwardness, as with these bungling hands,
We try to uproot the ill, and plant with good
Life's barren soil : the child is learning use.
Perhaps the angels even are forbid
To laugh at us, or may not care to laugh,
With kind eyes pitying our little hurts.

'Tis ludicrous that man should think he roams
Freely at will a world planned for his use.
Lo, what a mite he is ! Snatched hither and yon,
Tossed round the sun, and in its orbit flashed
Round other centres, orbits without end ;
His bit of brain too small to even feel
The spinning of the little hailstone, Earth.
So his creeds glibly prate of choice and will,
When his whole fate is an invisible speck
Whirled through the orbits of Eternity.

We think that we believe
That human souls shall live, and live,
When trees have rotted into mould,
And all the rocks which these long hills enfold

Have crumbled, and beneath new oceans lie.
But why—ah, why—
If puny man is not indeed to die,
Watch I with such disdain
That human speck creeping along the plain,
And turn with such a careless scorn of men'
Back to the mountain's brow again,
And feel more pleased that some small, fluttering
thing
Trusts me and hovers near on fearless wing,
Than if the proudest man in all the land
Had offered me in friendliness his hand?

However small the present creature man,—
Ridiculous imitation of the gods,
Weak plagiarism on some completer world,—
Yet we can boast of that strong race to be.
The savage broke the attraction which binds fast
The fibres of the oak, and we to-day
By cunning chemistry can force apart
The elements of the air. That coming race
Shall loose the bands by which the earth attracts ;
A drop of occult tincture, a spring touched
Shall outwit gravitation ; men shall float,
Or lift the hills and set them where they will.

The savage crossed the lake, and we the sea.
That coming race shall have no bounds or bars,
But, like the fledgling eaglet, leave the nest,—
Our earthly eyrie up among the stars,—
And freely soar, to tread the desolate moon,
Or mingle with the neighbor folk of Mars.
Yea, if the savage learned by sign and sound
To bridge the chasm to his fellow's brain,
Till now we flash our whispers round the globe,
That race shall signal over the abyss
To those bright souls who throng the outer courts
Of life, impatient who shall greet men first
And solve the riddles that we die to know.

'Tis night : I sit alone among the hills.
There is no sound, except the sleepless brook,
Whose voice comes faintly from the depths below
Through the thick darkness, or the somber pines
That slumber, murmuring sometimes in their dreams.
Hark ! on a fitful gust there came the sound
Of the tide rising yonder on the bay.
It dies again : 'twas like the rustling noise
Of a great army mustering secretly.
There rose an owl's cry, from the woods below,
Like a lost spirit's.—Now all's still again.—

'Tis almost fearful to sit here alone
And feel the deathly silence and the dark.
I will arise and shout, and hear at least
My own voice answer.—Not an echo even !
I wish I had not uttered that wild cry ;
It broke with such a shock upon the air,
Whose leaden silence closed up after it,
And seemed to clap together at my ears.
The black depths of these muffled woods are
thronged
With shapes that wait some signal to swoop out,
And swirl around and madden me with fear.
I will go climb that bare and rocky height
Into the clearer air.

So, here I breathe ;
That silent darkness smothered me.

Away
Across the bay, the city with its lights
Twinkling against the horizon's dusky line,
Looks a sea-dragon, crawled up on the shore,
With rings of fire across his rounded back,
And luminous claws spread out among the hills.
Above, the glittering heavens.—Magnificent !
Oh, if a man could be but as a star,

Having his place appointed, here to rise,
And there to set, unchanged by earthly change,
Content if it can guide some wandering bark,
Or be a beacon to some home-sick soul !

Those city-lights again : they draw my gaze
As if some secret human sympathy
Still held my heart down from the lonely heaven.
A new-born constellation, setting there
Below the Sickle's ruby-hilted curve,
They gleam —— Not so ! No constellation they ;
I mock the sad, strong stars that never fail
In their eternal patience ; from below
Comes that pale glare, like the faint, sulphurous
flame
Which plays above the ashes of a fire :
So trembles the dull flicker of those lamps
Over the burnt-out energies of man.

II

A month since I last laid my pencil down,—
An April, fairer than the Atlantic June,
Whose calendar of perfect days was kept
By daily blossoming of some new flower.
The fields, whose carpets now were silken white,
Next week were orange-velvet, next, sea-blue.
It was as if some central fire of bloom,
From which in other climes a random root
Is now and then shot up, here had burst forth
And overflowed the fields, and set the land
Aflame with flowers. I watched them day by day,
How at the dawn they wake, and open wide
Their little petal-windows, how they turn
Their slender necks to follow round the sun,
And how the passion they express all day
In burning color, steals forth with the dew
All night in odor.

I have wandered much
These weeks, but everywhere a restless mind
Has dogged me, like the shadow at my heels.

Sometimes I watched the morning mist arise,
Like an imprisoned Genie from the stream,
And wished that death would come on me like dawn,
Drawing the spirit, that white, vaporous mist,
Up from this noisy, fretted stream of life,
To fall where God will, in his bounteous showers.
Sometimes I walked at sunset on the edge
Of the steep gorge, and saw my shadow pace
Along a shadow-wall across the abyss,
And felt that we, with all our phantom deeds,
Are but far-slanted shadows of some life
That walks between our planet and its God.
All the long nights—those memory-haunted nights,
When sleepless conscience would not let me sleep,
But stung, and stung, and pointed to the world
Which like a coward I had left behind,
I watched the heavens, where week by week the moon
Slow swelled its silver bud, blossomed full gold,
And slowly faded.

Laid the pencil down—
Why not? Are there not books enough? Is man
A sick child that must be amused by songs,
Or be made sicker with their foolish noise?

'Then illness came : I should have argued, once,
That the ill body gave me those ill thoughts ;
But I have learned that spirit, though it be
Subtile, and hard to trace, is mightier
Than matter, and I know the poisoned mind
Poisoned its shell. Three days of fever-fire
Burned out my strength, leaving me scarcely power
To reach the brook's side and my scanty food.
What would I not have given to hear the voice
Of some one who would raise my throbbing head
And shade the fevering sun, and cool my hand
In her moist palms ! But I lay there, alone.
Blessed be sickness, which cuts down our pride
And bares our helplessness. I have had new thoughts.
I think the fever burned away some lies
Which clogged the truthful currents of the brain.
Am I quite happy here ? Have I the right,
As wholly independent, to scorn men ?
What do I owe them—self ? Should I be I,
Born in these hills ? A savage rather ! Food,
The sailor-bread ? Yes, that took mill and men :
Yet flesh and fowl are free ; but powder and gun—
What human lives went to the making of them ?
I am dependent as the villager
Who lives by the white wagon's daily round.

Yea, better feed upon the ox, to which
The knife is mercy after slavery,
Than kill the innocent birds, and trustful deer
Whose big blue eyes have almost human pain ;
That's murder !

I scorned books : to those same books
I owe the power to scorn them.

I despised
Men : from themselves I drew the pure ideal
By which to measure them.

At woman's love
I laughed : but to that love I owe
The hunger for a more abiding love.
Their nestlings in our hearts leave vacant there
These hollow places, like a lark's round nest
Left empty in the grass, and filled with flowers.

What do I here alone ? 'Twas not so strange,
Weary of discords, that I chose to hear
The one, clear, perfect note of solitude ;
But now it plagues the ear, that one shrill note :
Give me the chords back, even though some ring false.

Unmarried to the steel, the flint is cold :
Strike one to the other, and they wake in fire.

A solitary fagot will not burn :
Bring two, and cheerily the flame ascends.
Alone, man is a lifeless stone ; or lies
A charring ember, smouldering into ash.

If the man riding yonder looks a speck,
The town an ant-hill, that is but the trick
Of our perspective : wisdom merely means
Correction of the angles at the eye.
I hold my hand up, so, before my face,—
It blots ten miles of country, and a town.
This little lying lens, that twists the rays,
So cheats the brain that My house, My affairs,
My hunger, or My happiness, My ache,
And My religion, fill immensity !
Yours merely dot the landscape casually.
’Tis well God does not measure a man’s worth
By the image on his neighbor’s retina.

I am alone : the birds care not for me,
Except to sing a little farther off,
With looks that say, “ What does this fellow here ? ”
The loud brook babbles only for the flowers :
The mountain and the forest take me not
Into their meditations ; I disturb

Their silence, as a child that drags his toy
Across a chapel's porch. The viewless ones
Who flattered me to claim their company
By gleams of thought they tossed to me for alms,
About their grander matters turn, nor deign
To notice me, unless it were to say—
As we put off a troublesome child—"There, go!
Men are your fellows, go and mate with them!"

If I could find one soul that would not lie,
I would go back, and we would arm our hands,
And strike at every ugly weed that stands

In God's wide garden of the world, and try,
Obedient to the Gardener's commands,
To set some smallest flowers before we die.

One such I had found,—
But she was bound,
Fettered and led, bid for and sold,
Chained to a stone by a ring of gold.

In a stony sense the stone loved her, too :
Between our places the river was broad,
Should she tread on a broken heart to go through—

Could she put a man's life in mid-stream to be trod,
To come over dry-shod ?

Shame ! that a man with hand and brain
Should, like a love-lorn girl, complain,
Rhyming his dainty woes anew,
When there is honest work to do !

What work, what work ? Is God not wise
To rule the world He could devise ?
Yet see thou, though the realm be His,
He governs it by deputies.
Enough to know of Chance and Luck,
The stroke we choose to strike is struck ;
The deed we slight will slighted be,
In spite of all Necessity.
The Parcæ's web of good and ill
They weave with human shuttles still,
And fate is fate through man's free will.

With sullen thoughts that smoulder hour by hour,
In vague expectancy of help or hope
Which still eludes my brain, waiting I sit
Like a blind beggar at a palace-gate,

Who hears the rustling past of silks, and airs
Of costly odor mock him blowing by,
And feels within a dull and aching wish
That the proud wall would let some coping down
To crush him dead, and let him have his rest.

No help from men : they could not, if they would.
And God? He lets his world be wrung with pain.
No help at all then? Let life be in vain :
To get no help is surely greatest gain ;
To taunt the hunger down is sweetest food.

O mocker, Memory! From what floating cloud,
Or from what witchery of the haunted wood,
Or faintest perfumes, softly drifting through
The lupines' lattice-bars of white and blue,
Steals back upon my soul this weaker mood?
My heart is dreaming ;—in a shadowy room
I breathe the vague scent of a jasmin-bloom
That floats on waves of music, softer played,
Till song and odor all the brain pervade ;
Swiftly across my cheek there sweeps the thrill
Of burning lips,—then all is hushed and still ;
And round the vision in unearthly awe
Depths of enchanted starlight seem to draw,

In which my soul sinks, falling noiselessly,—
As from a lone ship, far-off, in the night,
Out of a child's hand slips a pebble white,
Glimmering and fading down the awful sea.

That night, which pushed me out of Paradise,
When the last guest had taken his mask of smiles
And gone, she wheeled a sofa from the light
Where I sat touching the piano-keys,
And begged me play her weariness away.
I played all sweet and solemn airs I knew,
And when, with music mesmerized, she slept,
I made the deep chords tell her dreams my love.
Once, when they grew too passionate, I saw
The faint blush ripen in their glow, and chide
Even in dreams, the rash, tumultuous thought.
Then when I made them say, "Sleep on, dream on,
For now we are together ; when thou wak'st
Forevermore we are alone—alone,"
She sighed in sleep, and waked not : then I rose,
And softly stooped my head, and, half in awe,
Half passion-rapt, I kissed her lips farewell.
—— Only the meek-mouthed blossoms kiss I now,
Or the cold cheek that sometimes comes at night
In haunted dreams, and brushes past my own.

Ah, what hast thou to do with me, sweet song—

Why hauntest thou and vexest so my dreams?

Have I not turned away from thee so long—

So long, and yet the starry midnight seems

Astir with tremulous music, as of old,—

Forbidden memories opening, fold on fold?

O ghost of Love, why, with thy rose-leaf lips,

Dost thou still mock my sleep with kisses warm,

Torturing my dreams with touching finger-tips,

That madden me to clasp thy phantom form?

Have I not earned, by all these tears, at last,

The right to rest untroubled by that Past?



Unto thy patient heart, my mother Earth,

I come, a weary child.

I have no claim, save that thou gav'st me birth,

And hast sustained me with thy nurture mild.

I have stood up alone, these many years ;

Now let me come and lie upon my face,

And spread my hands among the dewy grass,

Till the slow wind's mesmeric touches pass

Above my brain, and all its throbbing chase ;

Into thy bosom take these bitter tears,

And let them seem unto the innocent flowers
Only as dew, or heaven's gentle showers ;
Till, quieted and hushed against thy breast,
I can forget to weep,
And sink at last to sleep,—
Long sleep and rest.

Her face !

It must have been her face,—
No other one was ever half so fair,—
No other head e'er bent with such meek grace
Beneath that weight of beautiful blonde hair.
In a carriage on the street of the town,
Where I had strayed in walking from the bay,
Just as the sun was going down,
Shielding her sight from his latest ray,
She sat, and scanned with eager eye
The faces of the passers-by.
Whom was she looking for? Not me—
Yet what wild purpose can it be
That tempted her to this wild land?
—I marked that on her lifted hand
The diamonds no longer shine
Of the ring that meant, not mine—not mine !

Ah fool—fool—fool ! crawl back to thy den,
Like a wounded beast as thou art, again ;
Whosoever she be, not thine—not thine !

I sat last night on yonder ridge of rocks
To see the sun set over Tamelpais,
Whose tented peak, suffused with rosy mist,
Blended the colors of the sea and sky
And made the mountain one great amethyst
Hanging against the sunset.

In the west

There lay two clouds which parted company,
Floating like two soft-breasted swans, and sailed
Farther and farther separate, till one stayed
To make a mantle for the evening-star ;
The other wept itself away in rain.
A fancy seized me ;—if, in other worlds,
That Spirit from afar should call to me,
Across some starry chasm impassable,
Weeping, “ Oh, hadst thou only come to me !—
I loved you so !—I prayed each night that God
Would send you to me ! Now, alas ! too late,
Too late—farewell !” and still again, “ farewell !”
Like the pulsation of a silenced bell
Whose sobs beat on within the brain.

I rose,
And smote my staff strongly against the ground,
And set my face homeward, and set my heart
Firm in a passionate purpose : there, in haste,
With that one echo goading me to speed,
“ If it should be too late—if it should be
Too late—too late !” I took a pen and wrote :

“ Dear Soul, if I am mad to speak to thee,
And this faint glimmer which I call a hope
Be but the corpse-light on the grave of hope—
If thou, O darling Star, art in the West
To be my Evening-star, and watch my day
Fade slowly into desolate twilight, burn
This folly in the flames ; and scattered with
Its ashes, let my madness be forgot.
But if not so, oh be my Morning-star,
And crown my East with splendor : come to me !”

A stern, wild, broken place for a man to walk
And muse on broken fortunes ; a rare place,—
There in the Autumn weather, cool and still,
With the warm sunshine clinging round the rocks
Softly, in pity, like a woman’s love,—
To wait for some one who can never come—

As a man there was waiting. Overhead
A happy bird sang quietly to himself,
Unconscious of such sombre thoughts below,
To which the song was background :—

“ Yet how men

Sometimes will struggle, writhe, and scream at death !
It were so easy now, in the mild air,
To close the senses, slowly sleep, and die ;
To cease to be the shaped and definite cloud,
And melt away into the fathomless blue ;—
Only to touch this crimson thread of life,
Whose steady ripple pulses in my wrist,
And watch the little current soak the grass,
Till the haze came, then darkness, and then rest.
Would God be angry if I stopped one life
Among his myriads—such a worthless one ?
If I should pray, I wonder would he send
An angel down out of that great, white cloud,
(He surely could spare one from praising Him,)
To tell if there is any better way
Than —— Look ! Why, that is grand, now ! (Am
I mad ?

I did not think I should go mad !) That's grand—
One of the blessed spirits come like this

To meet a poor, lean man among the rocks,
And answer questions for him ?”

There she stood,
With blonde hair blowing back, as if the breeze
Blew a light out of it, that ever played
And hovered at her shoulders. Such blue eyes
Mirrored the dreamy mountain distances,—
(Yet, are the angels’ faces thin and wan
Like that ; and do they have such mouths, so drawn,
As if a sad song, some sad time, had died
Upon the lips, and left its echo there ?)

And the man rose, and stood with folded hands
And head bent, and his downcast looks in awe
Touching her garment’s hem, that, when she spoke,
Trembled a little where it met her feet.

“I am come, because you called to me to come.
What were all other voices when I heard
The voice of my own soul’s soul call to me?
You knew I loved you—oh, you must have known !
Was it a noble thing to do, you think,
To leave a lonely girl to die down there

In the great empty world, and come up here
To make a martyr's pillar of your pride?
There has been nobler work done, there in the world,
Than you have done this year !”

Then cried the man :

“ O voice that I have prayed for—O sad voice,
And woful eyes, spare me if I have sinned !
There was a little ring you used to wear —”

“ O strange, wild Fates, that balance bliss and woe
On such poor straws ! It was a brother's gift.”

“ You never told me—”

“ Did you ever ask ?”

“ You, too, were surely prouder then than now !”

“ Dear, I am sadder now : the head must bend
A little, when one's weeping.”

Then the man,—

While half his mind, bewildered, at a flash
Took in the wide, lone place, the singing bird,
The sunshine streaming past them like a wind,
And the broad tree that moved as tho' it breathed :

“Oh, if 'tis possible that in the world
There lies some low, mean work for me to do,
Let me go there alone : I am ashamed
To wear life's crown when I flung down its sword.
Crammed full of pride, and lust, and littleness,
O God, I am not worthy of thy gifts !
Let me find penance, till, years hence, perchance,
Made pure by toil, and scourged with pain and
prayer—”

Then a voice answered thro' His creature's lips—
“God asks no penance but a better life.
He purifies by pain—He only ; 'tis
A remedy too dangerous for our
Blind pharmacy. Lo ! we have tried that way,
And borne what fruit, or blossoms even, save one
Poor passion-flower ! Come, take thy happiness ;
In happy hearts are all the sunbeams forged
That brighten up our weatherbeaten world.
Come back with me—Come ! for I love you—Come !”

If it was not a dream : perchance it was—
Often it seems so, and I wonder when

I shall awaken on the mountain-side,
With a little bitter taste left in the mouth
Of too much sleep, or too much happiness,
And sigh, and wish that I might dream again.

II

SUNDOWN.

A SEA of splendor in the West,
Purple, and pearl, and gold,
With milk-white ships of cloud, whose sails
Slowly the winds unfold.

Brown cirrus-bars, like ribbed beach-sand,
Cross the blue upper dome ;
And nearer flecks of feathery white
Blow over them like foam.

But when that transient glory dies
Into the twilight gray,
And leaves me on the beach alone
Beside the glimmering bay ;

And when I know that, late or soon,
 Love's glory finds a grave,
And hearts that danced like dancing foam
 Break like the breaking wave ;

A little dreary, homeless thought
 Creeps sadly over me,
Like the shadow of a lonely cloud
 Moving along the sea.

III

THE ARCH.

JUST where the street of the village ends,
Over the road an oak-tree tall,
Curving in more than a crescent, bends
With an arch like the gate of a Moorish wall.

Over across the river there,
Looking under the arch, one sees
The sunshine slant through the distant air,
And burn on the cliff and the tufted trees.

Each day, hurrying through the town,
I stop an instant, early or late,
As I cross the street, and glancing down
I catch a glimpse through the Moorish gate.

Only a moment there I stand,
But I look through that loop in the dusty air,
Into a far-off fairy land,
Where all seems calm, and kind, and fair.

So sometimes at the end of a thought,
Where with a vexing doubt we've striven,
A sudden, sunny glimpse is caught
Of an open arch, and a peaceful heaven.

IV

APRIL IN OAKLAND.*

WAS there last night a snow-storm?--
So thick the orchards stand,
With drift on drift of blossom-flakes
Whitening all the land.

Or have the waves of life that swelled
The green buds, day by day,
Broken at once in clinging foam
And scattered odor-spray?

The wind comes drowsy with the breath
Of cherry and of pear,
Sighing their perfume-laden wings
No more of sweet can bear.

* California.

Over the garden-gateway
That parts the tufted hedge,
Rimming the idly-twinkling bay
Sleeps the blue mountains' edge.

Yon fleece of clouds in heaven,
So delicate and fair,
Seems a whole league of orchard-bloom
Sailing along the air.

Oh, loveliness of nature !
Oh, sordid minds of men !
Without, a world of bloom and balm—
A sour, sad soul within.

O winds that sweep the orchard
✱ With Orient spices sweet,
Why bring ye with that desolate sound
The dead leaves to my feet ?

Ah, sweeter were the fragrance
That I to-day have found,
If last year's crumbled leaves of love
Were buried under ground ;

And fairer were the shadow troops
That fleck the distant hill,
If shades of clouds that will not pass
Dimmed not my memory still.

Better than all the beauty
Which cloud or blossom shows,
Is the blue sky that arches all
With measureless repose.

And better than the bright blue sky,
To know that far away
Sweeps all the silent host of stars
Behind the veil of day.

And best to feel that there and here,
About us and above,
Move on the purposes of God
In justice and in love.

V

EASTERN WINTER.

COLD—cold—the very sun looks cold,
With those thin rays of chilly gold
Laid on that gap of bluish sky
That glazes like a dying eye.

The naked trees are shivering,
Each cramped and bare branch quivering,
Cutting the bleak wind into blades,
Whose edge to brain and bone invades.

That hard ground seems to ache, all day,
Even for a sheet of snow, to lay
Upon its icy feet and knees,
Stretched stiffly there to freeze and freeze.

And yon shrunk mortal—what's within
That nipped and winter-shrivelled skin?
The pinched face drawn in peevish lines,
The voice that through his blue lips whines,—

The frost has got within, you see,—
Left but a selfish *me* and *me* :
The heart is chilled, its nerves are numb,
And love has long been frozen dumb.

Ah, give me back the clime I know,
Where all the year geraniums blow,
And hyacinth-buds bloom white for snow ;

Where hearts beat warm with life's delight,
Through radiant winter's sunshine bright,
And summer's starry deeps of night ;

Where man may let earth's beauty thaw
The wintry creed which Calvin saw,
That God is only Power and Law ;

And out of Nature's bible prove,
That here below as there above
Our Maker—Father—God—is Love.

VI

SLEEPING.

HUSHED within her quiet bed
She is lying, all the night,
In her pallid robe of white,
Eyelids on the pure eyes pressed,
Soft hands folded on the breast,—
And you thought I meant it—dead?

Nay! I smile at your shocked face :
In the morning she will wake,
Turn her dreams to sport, and make
All the household glad and gay,
Yet for many a merry day,
With her beauty and her grace.

But some Summer 'twill be said—
 “ She is lying, all the night,
 In her pallid robe of white,
 Eyelids on the tired eyes pressed,
Hands that cross upon the breast :”
We shall understand it—dead !

Yet 'twill only be a sleep :
 When, with songs and dewy light,
 Morning blossoms out of Night,
 She will open her blue eyes
 'Neath the palms of Paradise,
While we foolish ones shall weep.

VII

STARLIGHT.

THEY think me daft, who nightly meet
My face turned starward, while my feet
Stumble along the unseen street ;

But should man's thoughts have only room
For Earth, his cradle and his tomb,
Not for his Temple's grander gloom ?

And must the prisoner all his days
Learn but his dungeon's narrow ways
And never through its grating gaze ?

Then let me linger in your sight,
My only amaranths ! blossoming bright
As over Eden's cloudless night.

The same vast belt, and square, and crown,
That on the Deluge glittered down,
And lit the roofs of Bethlehem town !

Ye make me one with all my race,
A victor over time and space,
Till all the path of men I pace.

Far-speeding backward in my brain
We build the Pyramids again,
And Babel rises from the plain ;

And climbing upward on your beams
I peer within the Patriarch's dreams,
Till the deep sky with angels teems.

My Comforters !—Yea, why not mine ?
The power that kindled you doth shine,
In man, a mastery divine ;

That Love which throbs in every star,
And quickens all the worlds afar,
Beats warmer where his children are.

The shadow of the wings of Death
Broods over us ; we feel his breath :
“ Resurgam,” still the spirit saith.

These tired feet, this weary brain,
Blotted with many a mortal stain,
May crumble earthward—not in vain.

With swifter feet that shall not tire,
Eyes that shall fail not at your fire,
Nearer your splendors I aspire.

VIII

A DEAD BIRD IN WINTER.

THE cold, hard sky and hidden sun,
The stiffened trees that shiver so,
With bare twigs naked every one
To these harsh winds that freeze the snow,—

It was a bitter place to die,
Poor birdie ! Was it easier, then,
On such a world to shut thine eye,
And sleep away from life, than when

The apple-blossoms tint the air,
And, twittering in the sunny trees,
Thy fellow-songsters flit and pair,
Breasting the warm, caressing breeze ?

Nay, it were easiest, I feel,
Though 'twere a brighter Earth to lose,
To let the summer shadows steal
About thee, bringing their repose ;

When the noon hush was on the air,
And on the flowers the warm sun shined,
And Earth seemed all so sweet and fair,
That He who made it must be kind.

So I, too, could not bear to go
From Life in this unfriendly clime,
To lie beneath the crusted snow,
When the dead grass stands stiff with rime ;

But under those blue skies of home,
Far easier were it to lie down,
Where the perpetual violets bloom,
And the rich moss grows never brown ;

Where linnets never cease to build
Their nests, in boughs that always wave
To odorous airs, with blessing filled
From nestled blossoms round my grave.

IX

SPRING TWILIGHT.

SINGING in the rain, robin ?
Rippling out so fast
All thy flute-like notes, as if
This singing were thy last !

After sundown, too, robin ?
Though the fields are dim,
And the trees grow dark and still,
Dripping from leaf and limb.

'Tis heart-broken music—
That sweet, faltering strain,—
Like a mingled memory,
Half ecstasy, half pain.

Surely thus to sing, robin,
Thou must have in sight
Beautiful skies behind the shower,
And dawn beyond the night.

Would thy faith were mine, robin !
Then, though night were long,
All its silent hours should melt
Their sorrow into song.

X

EVENING.

THE Sun is gone : those glorious chariot-wheels
Have sunk their broadening spokes of flame,
and left
Thin rosy films wimpled across the West,
Whose last faint tints melt slowly in the blue,
As the last trembling cadence of a song
Fades into silence sweeter than all sound.

Now the first stars begin to tremble forth
Like the first instruments of an orchestra
Touched softly, one by one.—There in the East
Kindles the glory of moonrise : how its waves
Break in a surf of silver on the clouds !—
White, motionless clouds, like soft and snowy wings
Which the great Earth spreads, sailing round the Sun.

O silent stars ! that over ages past
Have shone serenely as ye shine to-night,
Unseal, unseal the secret that ye keep !
Is it not time to tell us why we live ?
Through all these shadowy corridors of years,
(Like some gray Priest, who through the Mysteries
Led the blindfolded Neophyte in fear,)
Time leads us blindly onward, till in wrath
Tired Life would seize and throttle its stern guide,
And force him tell us *whither* and *how long*.
But Time gives back no answer—only points
With motionless finger to eternity,
Which deepens over us, as that deep sky—
Darkens above me : only its vestibule
Glimmers with scattered stars ; and down the West
A silent meteor slowly slides afar,
As though, pacing the garden-walks of heaven,
Some musing seraph had let fall a flower.

XI

THE ORGAN.

IT is no harmony of human making,
Though men have built those pipes of bur-
nished gold ;
Their music, out of Nature's heart awaking,
Forever new, forever is of old.

Man makes not—only finds—all earthly beauty,
Catching a thread of sunshine here and there,
Some shining pebble in the path of duty,
Some echo of the songs that flood the air.

That prelude is a wind among the willows,
Rising until it meets the torrent's roar ;
Now a wild ocean, beating his great billows
Among the hollow caverns of the shore.

It is the voice of some vast people, pleading
For justice from an ancient shame and wrong,—
The tramp of God's avenging armies, treading
With shouted thunders of triumphant song.

O soul, that sittest chanting dreary dirges,
Couldst thou but rise on some divine desire,
As those deep chords upon their swelling surges
Bear up the wavering voices of the choir !

But ever lurking in the heart, there lingers
The trouble of a false and jarring tone,
As some great Organ which unskilful fingers
Vex into discords when the Master's gone.

XII

A MEMORY.

UPON the barren, lonely hill
We sat to watch the sinking sun ;
Below, the land grew dim and still,
Whose evening shadow had begun.
Her finger parted the shut book,—
At Aylmer's Field the leaf was turned—
Round her meek head and sainted look
The sunset like a halo burned.
She knew not that I watched her face—
Her spirit through her eyes was gone
To some far-off and Sabbath place,
And left me gazing there alone.
Could she have known, that quiet hour,
What ghosts her presence raised in me,
What graves were opened by the power
Of that unconscious witchery,

She would not thus have sat and seen
The bird that balanced far below
On the blue air, and watched the sheen
Along his broad wings come and go.
For was she not another's bride?
And I—what right had I to feast
Upon those eyes in revery wide,
With hungering gaze like famished beast?
Was it before my fate I knelt—
The human fate, the mighty law—
To hunger for the heart I felt,
And love the lovely face I saw?
Or was it only that the brow,
Or some sweet trick of hand or tone,
Brought from the Past to haunt me now
Her ghost whose love was mine alone?
I know not; but we went to rest
That eve, from songs that haunt me still,
And all night long, in visions blest,
I walked with angels on the hill.

XIII

LOST LOVE.

BURY it, and sift
Dust upon its light,—
Death must not be left
To offend the sight.

Cover the old love—
Weep not on the mound—
Grass shall grow above,
Lilies spring around.

Can we fight the law,
Can our natures change—
Half-way through withdraw—
Other lives exchange?

You and I must do
As the world has done,
There is nothing new
Underneath the sun.

Fill the grave up full—
Put the dead love by—
Not that men are dull,
Not that women lie,—

But 'tis well and right—
Safest, you will find—
That the Out of Sight
Should be Out of Mind.

XIV

INFLUENCES.

FROM the scarlet sea of sunset,
Tossing up its waves of fire
To a floating spray of splendor,
Kindles through me mad desire
Now—now—now to call her mine !

From the ashen gray of twilight
Musings dark as shadows linger—
Slowly creeping, leave me weeping—
While in silence round my finger
That long glossy lock I twine.

From the holy hush of starlight
Sinks a peace upon my spirit,
And a voice of hope and patience—
All the quiet night I hear it—
Whispers, “Wait, for she is thine !”

XV

A DAILY MIRACLE.

JUNE'S sunshine on the broad porch shines
Through tangled curtains of crossing vines ;
The restless dancing of the leaves
Dusky webs of shadow weaves,
That wander on the oaken floor,
Or cross the threshold of the door.
Scattered where'er their mazes run
Lie little phantoms of the sun :
Whatever chink the sunbeam found,
Crooked or narrow, on the ground
The shadowy image still is round.

So the image of God in the heart of a man,
Which truth makes, rifting as it can
Through the narrow crooked ways
Of our restless deeds and days,
Still is His image—bright or dim—
And scorning it, is scorning Him.

★

XVI

L I F E .

F^ORENOON, and afternoon, and night,—Fore-
noon,

And afternoon, and night,—Forenoon, and—what !

The empty song repeats itself. No more ?

Yea, that is Life : make this forenoon sublime,

This afternoon a psalm, this night a prayer,

And Time is conquered, and thy crown is won.

XVII

THE CHOICE.

ONLY so much of power each day—
So much nerve-force brought in play :
If it goes for politics or trade,
Ends gained or money made,
You have it not for the soul and God—
The choice is yours, to soar or plod.
So much water in the rill :
It may go to turn the miller's wheel,
Or sink in the desert, or flow on free
To brighten its banks in meadows green,
Till broadening out, fair fields between,
It streams to the moon-enchanted sea.
Only so little power each day :
Week by week days slide away ;
Ere the life goes, what shall it be—
A trade—a game—a mockery,
Or the gate of a rich Eternity?

XVIII

M O R N I N G .

I ENTERED once, at break of day,
A chapel, lichen-stained and gray,
Where a congregation dozed and heard
An old monk read from a written Word.
No light through the window-panes could pass,
For shutters were closed on the rich-stained glass ;
And in a gloom like the nether night
The monk read on by a taper's light.
Ghostly with shadows, that shrank and grew
As the dim light flared, were aisle and pew ;
And the congregation that dozed around,
Listened without a stir or sound—
Save one, who rose with wistful face,
And shifted a shutter from its place.

Then light flashed in like a flashing gem—
For dawn had come unknown to them—
And a slender beam, like a lance of gold,
Shot to a crimson curtain-fold,
Over the bended head of him
Who pored and pored by the taper dim ;
And it kindled over his wrinkled brow
Such words—“ The law which was till now ;”
And I wondered that, under that morning ray,
When night and shadow were scattered away,
The monk should bow his locks of white
By a taper’s feebly flickering light—
Should pore, and pore, and never seem
To notice the golden morning-beam.

XIX

A PRAYER.

O GOD, our Father, if we had but truth !
Lost truth—which thou perchance
Didst let man lose, lest all his wayward youth
He waste in song and dance ;
That he might gain, in searching, mightier powers
For manlier use in those foreshadowed hours.

If, blindly groping, he shall oft mistake,
And follow twinkling notes
Thinking them stars, and the one voice forsake
Of Wisdom for the notes
Which mocking Beauty utters here and there,
Thou surely wilt forgive him, and forbear !

Oh love us, for we love thee, Maker—God !
And would creep near thy hand,
And call thee “ Father, Father,” from the sod
Where by our graves we stand,
And pray to touch, fearless of scorn or blame,
Thy garment’s hem, which Truth and Good we name.

XX

THE POLAR SEA.

A T the North, far away,
Rolls a great sea for aye,
Silently, awfully.
Round it on every hand
Ice-towers majestic stand,
Guarding this silent sea
Grimly, invincibly.
Never there man hath been,
Who hath come back again,
Telling to ears of men
What is this sea within.
Under the starlight,
Rippling the moonlight,
Drinking the sunlight,

Desolate, never heard nor seen,
Beating forever it hath been.

From our life far away
Roll the dark waves, for aye,
Of an Eternity,
Silently, awfully.
Round it on every hand
Death's icy barriers stand,
Guarding this silent sea
Grimly, invincibly.
Never there man hath been
Who could return again,
Telling to mortal ken
What is within the sea
Of that Eternity.

Terrible is our life—
In its whole blood-written history
Only a feverish strife ;
In its beginning, a mystery—
In its wild ending, an agony.
Terrible is our death—

Black-hanging cloud over Life's setting sun,
Darkness of night when the daylight is done.
In the shadow of that cloud,
Deep within that darkness' shroud,
Rolls the ever-throbbing sea ;
And we—all we—
Are drifting rapidly
And floating silently
Into that unknown sea—
Into Eternity.

XXI

FAITH.

THE tree-top, high above the barren field,
Rising beyond the night's gray folds of mist,
Rests stirless where the upper air is sealed
To perfect silence, by the faint moon kiss'd.
But the low branches, drooping to the ground,
Sway to and fro, as sways funereal plume,
While from their restless depths low whispers
sound—
“We fear, we fear the darkness and the gloom ;
Dim forms beneath us pass and reappear,
And mournful tongues are menacing us here.”

Then from the topmost bough falls calm reply—

“Hush, hush ! I see the coming of the morn ;
Swiftly the silent Night is passing by,

And in her bosom rosy Dawn is borne.

’Tis but your own dim shadows that ye see,

’Tis but your own low moans that trouble ye.”

So Life stands, with a twilight world around ;

Faith turned serenely to the steadfast sky,

Still answering the heart that sweeps the ground,

Sobbing in fear, and tossing restlessly—

“Hush, hush ! The Dawn breaks o’er the
Eastern sea,

’Tis but thine own dim shadow troubling thee.”

XXII

FERTILITY.

CLEAR water on smooth rock
Could give no foothold for a single flower,
Or slenderest shaft of grain :
The stone must crumble under storm and rain—
The forests crash beneath the whirlwind's power—
And broken boughs from many a tempest-shock,
And fallen leaves of many a wintry hour,
Must mingle in the mould,
Before the harvest whitens on the plain,
Bearing an hundred-fold.
Patience, O weary heart !
Let all thy sparkling hours depart,

And all thy hopes be withered with the frost,
And every effort tempest-tost—
So, when all life's green leaves
Are fallen, and mouldered underneath the sod,
Thou shalt go not too lightly to thy God,
But heavy with full sheaves.

XXIII

MUSIC.

THE little rim of moon hangs low—the room
Is saintly with the presence of the Night,
And Silence broods with knitted brows around.
The woven lilies of the velvet floor
Blend with the roses in the dusky light,
Which shows twin pictures glimmering from the
walls :

Here, a mailed group kneels by the rocky sea—
There, a gray desert, and a well, and palms ;
While the faint perfume of a violet,
Vague as a dream of Spring, pervades the air.
Where the moon gleams along the organ-front,
The crooked shadow of a dead branch stirs
Like ghostly fingers gliding through a tune.

Now rises one with faintly rustling robes,
And white hands search among the glistening keys.
Out of the silence sounds are forming—tones
That seem to come from infinite distances,—
Soft trebles fluttering down like snowy doves
Just dipping their swift wings in the deep base
That crumbles downward like a crumbling wave ;
And out of those low-gathering harmonies
A voice arises, tangled in their maze,
Then soaring up exultantly alone,
While the accompaniment wails and complains.
—I am upon the sea-shore. 'Tis the sound
Of ocean, surging on against the land.
That throbbing thunder is the roar of surf
Beaten and broken on the frothy rocks.
Those whispering trebles are the plashing waves
That ripple up the smooth sand's slope, and kiss
The tinkling shells with coy lips, quick withdrawn ;
And over all, the solitary voice
Is the wind wandering on its endless quest.
—A change comes, in a crash of minor chords.
I am a dreamer, waking from his dream
Into the life to which our life is sleep.
My soul is floating—floating, till afar
The round Earth rolls, with fleece of moonlit cloud,

A globe of amber, gleaming as it goes.
Deep in some hollow cavern of the sky
All human life is pleading to its God.
Still the accompaniment wails and complains ;—
A wild confusion of entangled chords,
Revenge, and fear, and strong men's agony,
The shrill cry of despair, the slow, deep swell
Of Time's long effort, sinking but to swell,
While woman's lonely love, and childhood's faith
Go wandering with soft whispers hand in hand.
Suddenly from the ages one pure soul
Is singled out to plead before the Throne ;
And then again the solitary voice
Peals up among the stars from the great throng,
Catching from out the storm all love, all hope,
All loveliness of life, and utters it.

Then the hushed music sobs itself to sleep,
And all is still,—save the reluctant sigh
That tells the wakening from immortal dreams.

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XXIV.

THREE SONGS.

SING me, thou Singer, a song of gold !
Said a careworn man to me :
So I sang of the golden summer days,
And the sad, sweet autumn's yellow haze,
Till his heart grew soft, and his mellowed gaze
Was a kindly sight to see.

Sing me, dear Singer, a song of love !
A fair girl asked of me :
Then I sang of a love that clasps the Race,
Gives all, asks naught—till her kindled face
Was radiant with the starry grace
Of blessed Charity.

Sing me, O Singer, a song of life !

Cried an eager youth to me :

And I sang of the life without alloy,

Beyond our years, till the heart of the boy

Caught the golden beauty, and love, and joy

Of the great Eternity.

XXV

DESPAIR AND HOPE.

WE sailed a cruise on a summer sea—
I, and a skull for company :

I in the stern our course to turn,
And it on the prow to grin at me.
Over the deep heaven, hung below,
Whose imaged clouds lay white like snow,
Glided we, as the tide might be,
Slipping swiftly, floating slow.

Past the woods all living green—

Save by the marge some fading tree,
Whose leaf, so early autumn-touched,
Would make the skull to grin at me.

Past a grove of fragrant pine,
From whose dusky depths of shade
Snowy shaft and colonnade
Marked a ruined altar-shrine ;—
And the skull's grim face grinned into mine.

Under the arch of a vine-clasped elm
Leaning off from the mossy land,
Across the shallow the idle helm
Lightly furrowed the silver sand :
Down the slope all clover-sweet
Danced a group in childish glee—
Hissed a swift snake at their feet ;—
Then the skull grinned unto me.

Into a cavern dim and dank
Crept we on the creeping tide ;
Shapeless creatures rose and sank,
Dripped with damp the ceiling wide.
Darker, chiller hung the air ;
Scarcely I the prow could see ;
But I, through the shadow there,
Felt the skull still grin at me.

Out of the cavern's thither side,
 Into a mellow, morn-like glow,
Streams the ripple-curving tide ;
 Sounds of music sweeter grow ;
Odorous incense, softened air,
Melodies so faint and fair,
 Thrill me through with life and love :
And all suddenly from the prow,
Where had seemed the skull just now,
 Flutters to my breast a dove.

XXVI

WISDOM AND FAME.

A WILDERNESS, made awful with the night—
Great glimmering trunks whose tops were
hid in gloom,

Vast columns in the blackness broken off,
Between whose ghostly forms, slow-wandering,
A company of lost men sought a path.

Some groped among the dead leaves and fallen
boughs

For footprints ; but the rattle of the leaves
And crook of stems seemed serpents coiled to strike.

Some took the momentary sparks that rode
Upon their straining eyeballs, for far lights,
And followed them.

Some stood apart, in vain
Searching, with horror-widened eyes, for stars.

So stumbling on, they circled round and round
Through the same mazes.

Then they singled one
To climb a pinnacled height, and see from thence
The landmarks, and to shout from thence their
course.

With aching sinews, bleeding feet, bruised hands,
He gained the height ; but when they cried to him
They got but maudlin answers,—he had found,
Slaking hot thirst, a fruit that maddened him.

Another, and another still they sent ;
But every one that climbed found the ill fruit
And maddened, and gave back but wild replies :
And still in darkness they go wandering, lost.

XXVII

SERENITY.

BROOK,
Be still,—be still !
Midnight's arch is broken
In thy ceaseless ripples.
Dark and cold below them
Runs the troubled water,—
Only on its bosom,
Shimmering and trembling,
Doth the glinted star-shine
Sparkle and cease.

Life,
Be still,—be still !
Boundless truth is shattered
On thy hurrying current.
Rest, with face uplifted,
Calm, serenely quiet ;
Drink the deathless beauty—
Thrills of love and wonder
Sinking, shining, star-like ;
Till the mirrored heaven
Hollow down within thee
Holy deeps unfathomed,
Where far thoughts go floating,
And low voices wander
Whispering peace.

XXVIII

THE RUBY HEART :

A CHILD'S STORY.

UNDER a fragrant blossom-bell
A tiny Fairy once did dwell.
The moss was bright about her feet,
Her little face was fair and sweet,
Her form in rainbow hues was clad,
And yet the Fairy's soul was sad ;
For, of the Elves that round her moved,
And in the yellow moonlight roved,
There was no Spirit that she loved.

Many a one there was, I ween,
Among the sprites that danced the green,

Whose hands were warm to clasp her own,
And voices kindly in their tone ;
But love the fondest and the best
Awaked no answer in her breast :
Her heart unmoved within her slept—
And, “I can never love !” she wept.

She taught herself a quaint old song
And crooned it over all day long :

*“He prayeth best who loveth best
All things, both great and small ;
For the dear God that loveth us,
He made and loveth all.”*

“But I,” she said, “can never pray,
Nor to His mansions find the way,
For He will suffer not, I know,
A creature unto Him to go
Who has not loved His world below.”

Slow-wandering by the brook alone,
She chose a pure white pebble-stone,

And carved it, sitting there apart,
Into a little marble heart ;
She hung it by her mossy bed—
“ My heart will never love,” she said,
“ Till this white stone turn ruby-red.”

One night a moonbeam smote her face
And wakened her, and in its place
There stood an angel, full of grace.
“ Dear child,” he said, “ from far above
I come to teach thee how to love.
Do every day some little deed
Of kindness, some faint creature feed,
Make some hurt spirit cease to bleed,
Then carve the record fair, at night,
Upon thy heart of marble white.
Each word shall turn to ruby-red,
And so much of thy task be sped ;—
For when the whole is ruddied o’er,
Thy bosom shall be cold no more ;
The souls thy careless thoughts contemn
Shall win thee by *thy* deeds to *them*.”

Upon the sorrowful Fairy broke
Like sudden sunshine this new hope.

Each day to some one's door, she took
A kindly act, or word, or look,
Whose record, fairly carved at night,
Blushed out upon the stony white ;
Till, somehow, wondrously there grew
More grace in every one she knew—
Each little ugliness concealed,
Each goodness more and more revealed,—
As, when you watch the twilight through,
The sky seems one pure empty blue,
Till, o'er the paling sunset-bars,
Suddenly 'tis one sweep of stars !

So day by day she found herself
Grow kindlier to each little elf ;
Yea, even to the birds and bees,
And slender flowerets round her knees :
The very moss-buds at her feet
She came with warmer smile to greet,
Till now, at last, her marble heart
Was ruddy, save one little part
That gleamed all snowy as of old
In the still moonbeams, white and cold.

Her task was almost done—she knelt
And hid her glad wet eyes, and felt
Her soul's first prayer steal up to God,
Like Spring's first violet from the sod.
Through all her being softly stole
Such joy of gratitude, her soul
Brimmed over like a brimming cup—
And then a voice said, "Child, look up!"
And lo! the stone above her head
Was a pure ruby, starry-red;
And down among the flowers there flew
Brushing aside the moonlit dew,
A little snowy elfin dove,
And nestled on her breast, to prove
Sweet trust in one whose heart was Love.

XXIX

TO CHILD ANNA.

AS in the Spring, ere any flowers have come,
A vague and blossomy smell
Pervades the woods, all odors mixed in one,
As if to tell
That they are mustering in each sunny dell,

So round your childish form there seems to cling
A sense of nameless grace,
A sweet confusion—budding hints of Spring
Just giving place
To graver woman-shadows in your face.

I see no longer the mere child you are—
The woman you might be
Stands in your place, with eyes that gaze afar :
Her face I see,
And it is very beautiful to me.

The little soft white hands you lay in mine
I touch with reverent care ;
I see them wrinkled into many a line,
But fair—more fair
For every weary deed they do and bear.

The fresh young mouth, all careless purity,
Has faded from my gaze,
And all the tender looks, which charity
And many patient days
Leave round the lips, seem now to take its place.

Therefore I stroke so tenderly your head,
Or watch your steps afar,
Praying that God His love on you will shed—
More faithful far
Than our blind human love and watching are.

XXX

THE WORLD'S SECRET.

I KNOW the splendor of the Sun,
And beauty in the leaves, and moss, and grass ;
I love the birds' small voices every one,
And all the hours have kindness as they pass ;

But still the heart can apprehend
A deeper purport than the brain may know :
I see it at the dying daylight's end,
And hear it when the winds begin to blow.

It strives to speak from all the world,
Out of dumb earth, and moaning ocean-tides ;
And brooding Night, beneath her pinions furled,
Some message writ in starry cipher hides.

Must I go seeking everywhere

 The meanings that behind our objects be—

A depth serener in the azure air,

 A something more than peace upon the sea?

Not one least deed one soul to bless?

 Unto the stern-eyed Future shall I bear

Only the sense of pain without redress,

 Self-sickness, and a dull and stale despair?

Nay, let me shape, in patience slow,

 My years, like the holy child his bird of clay,

Till suddenly the clod its Master know,

 And thrill with life, and soar with songs away.

XXXI

THE FOUNTAIN.

WERE it not horrible—
After all the dreams we dream,
Our yearnings and our prayers,
If this “I” were but a stream
Of thoughts, sensations, joys, and pains,
Which being clogged, no soul remains?
Even as the fountain seems to be
A shape of one identity,
But only is a stream of drops,
And when the swift succession stops,
The fountain melts and disappears,
Leaving no trace but scattered tears.
Yet even here, O foolish heart,
Thou wert not cheated of thy part ;

Were it not better, even here,
To keep thy current pure and clear,
With pearly drops of dew to wet
The amaranth and violet,
And round thy crystal feet to shower
Blessings and beauty ever hour—
Better than in a sullen flow
To creep around the ground, and go
Wasting and sinking through the sand,
Because not always thus to stand?

XXXII.

DISCONTENT.

O H THAT one could arise and flee
Unto blue-eyed Italy,
Far from mechanical clank and hum !
There to sit by the sighing sea,
And to dream of the days that shall be—shall be—
And the glory of years to come :
Or on some far ocean-isle,
Under the palm and the cocoa-tree,
To build of the coral boughs a home :
Or floating and falling adown the Nile,
To drown one's cares in the deeps of Time
And the desert's brooding mystery.

Yet howsoever we plot or plan,
In every age—through every clime—
Still the littleness of man
Would follow us, fast as we might flee ;
And the wrangling world break in on whatever is
tender and sweet,
As on a beautiful tune the rattling and noise of the
street.

XXXIII

SOLITUDE.

ALL alone—alone,
Calm, as on a kingly throne,
Take thy place in the crowded land,
Self-centred in free self-command.
Let thy manhood leave behind
The narrow ways of the lesser mind :
What to thee are its little cares,
The feeble love or the spite it bears ?
Let the noisy crowd go by :
In thy lonely watch on high,
Far from the chattering tongues of men,
Sitting above their call or ken,
Free from links of manner and form
Thou shalt learn of the wingèd storm—
God shall speak to thee out of the sky.

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XXXIV

A PARADOX.

HASTE, haste, O laggard !—leave thy drowsy
dreams ;
Cram all thy brain with knowledge—clutch and cram !
The earth is wide, the universe is vast :
Thou hast infinity to learn. Oh haste !

Haste not, haste not, my soul ! “ Infinity ? ”
Thou hast eternity to learn it in.
Thy boundless lesson through the endless years
Hath boundless leisure. Run not like a slave—
Sit like a king, and see the ranks of worlds
Wheel in their cycles onward to thy feet.

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XXXV

THE FUTURE.

WHAT may we take into the vast Forever?
That marble door
Admits no fruit of all our long endeavor,
No fame-wreathed crown we wore,
No garnered lore.

What can we bear beyond the unknown portal?
No gold, no gains
Of all our toiling : in the life immortal
No hoarded wealth remains,
Nor gilds, nor stains.

Naked from out that far abyss behind us

We entered here :

No word came with our coming, to remind us

What wondrous world was near,

No hope, no fear.

Into the silent, starless Night before us,

Naked we glide :

No hand has mapped the constellations o'er us,

No comrade at our side,

No chart, no guide.

Yet fearless toward that midnight, black and hollow,

Our footsteps fare :

The beckoning of a Father's hand we follow—

His love alone is there,

No curse, no care.

XXXVI

RETROSPECT.

NOT all which we have been
Do we remain,
Nor on the dial-hearts of men
Do the years mark themselves in vain ;
But every cloud that in our sky hath passed,
Some gloom or glory hath upon us cast ;
And there have fallen from us, as we travelled,
Many a burden of an ancient pain—
Many a tangled chord hath been unravelled,
Never to bind our foolish heart again.
Old loves have left us, lingeringly and slow,
As melts away the distant strain of low
Sweet music—waking us from troubled dreams,
Lulling to holier ones—that dies afar
On the deep night, as if by silver beams
Claspt to the trembling breast of some charmed star.

And we have stood and watched, all wistfully,
While fluttering hopes have died out of our lives,
As one who follows with a straining eye
A bird that far, far-off fades in the sky,
A little rocking speck—now lost ; and still he strives
A moment to recover it—in vain ;
Then slowly turns back to his work again.
But loves and hopes have left us in their place,
Thank God ! a gentle grace,
A patience, a belief in His good time,
Worth more than all earth's joys to which we climb.

XXXVII

H O M E.

I KNOW a spot beneath three ancient trees,
A solitude of green and grassy shade,
Where the tall roses, naked to the knees,
In that deep shadow wade,
Whose rippled coolness dri's from bough to bough,
And bathes the world's vexat'ion from my brow.

The gnarlèd limbs spring upward airy-free,
And never from their perfect arch they swerve,
Like spouted fountains from a dark, green sea,
So beautiful they curve,—
Motionless fountains, slumbering in mid-air,
With spray of shadows falling everywhere.

Here the Sun comes not like the king of day,
To rule his own, but hesitant ; afraid,
Forbears his sceptre's golden length to lay
Across the inviolate shade,
And wraps the broad space like a darkened tent,
With many a quivering shaft of splendor rent.

Seclusion, as an island still and lone,
Round which the Ocean-world may ebb and flow
Unheeded, following fruitlessly the moon ;
And where the soul may go
Naked of all its vanities and cares,
To meet the bounteous grace that Nature bares.

Here stretched at morn I watch the sunrise ray
That sweeps across the earth like minstrel's hand,
Waking from all the birds a song of day,
Caught up from land to land ;
And earth is beautiful and hearts are brave,
Ere busy Life has waked to claim her slave.

Each day—a pure and velvet-petall'd flower—

Blooms fresh at dawn, with trembling light bedewn,

But dull and tarnished at the mid-day hour—

The noisy, trampling noon—

Its beauty soiled with handling. Ever choose

The virgin morning for the soul to use.

The wind comes hushing, hushing through the trees,

Like surf that breaks on an invisible beach

And sends a spray of whispers down the breeze,

Whispers that seem to reach

From some far inner land where spirits dwell,

And hint the secret which they may not tell.

No garrulous company is here, but books—

Earth's best men taken at their best—books *used*,

With dark-edged paths and pencilled margin-strokes,

Where friends have paused and mused ;

And here and there, beneath the noticed lines,

Faint zigzag marks like little trailing vines.

Here, what to me are all the childish cares
That make a Bedlam of the busy world?
Each hour that flies some quiet message bears
Beneath its moments furled,
Like a white dove, that, under her soft wings,
Kind thoughts from far-off home and kindred
brings.

XXXVIII

THE DEAD PRESIDENT.

WERE there no crowns on earth,
No evergreen to weave a hero's wreath,
That he must pass beyond the gates of death,
Our hero, our slain hero, to be crowned?
Could there on our unworthy earth be found
Naught to befit his worth?

The noblest soul of all !
When was there ever, since our Washington,
A man so pure, so wise, so patient—one
Who walked with this high goal alone in sight,
To speak, to do, to sanction only Right,
Though very heaven should fall !

Ah, not for him we weep ;
What honor more could be in store for him ?
Who would have had him linger in our dim
And troublesome world, when his great work was
done—
Who would not leave that worn and weary one
Gladly to go to sleep ?

For us the stroke was just ;
We were not worthy of that patient heart ;
We might have helped him more, not stood apart,
And coldly criticised his works and ways :
Too late now, all too late—our little praise
Sounds hollow o'er his dust.

Be merciful, O God !
Forgive the meanness of our human hearts,
That never, till a noble soul departs,
See half the worth, or hear the angel's wings
Till they go rustling heavenward as he springs
Up from the mounded sod.

Yet, what a deathless crown
Of Northern pine and Southern orange-flower,
For victory, and the land's new bridal-hour,
Would we have wreathed for that beloved brow !
Sadly upon his sleeping forehead now
We lay our Cypress down.

O martyred one, farewell !
Thou hast not left thy people quite alone :
Out of thy beautiful life there comes a tone
Of power, of love, of trust—a prophecy,
Whose fair fulfilment all the earth shall be,
And all the Future tell.

XXXIX

SEEMING AND BEING.

THE brave old motto, "Seem not—only be,"—
Would it were set ablaze against the sky
In golden letters, where the world must read !
What is there done for the honest doing's sake,
In these poor times gone mad with self-parade ?
There's not a picture of the Cross but bears
The painter's name as prominent as the Christ's :
There's not a scene, of such peculiar grace
That one would fain forget men's meanness there,
But from the rocks some rascal clothier's name
Stares in great capitals, till one could wish
The knave hung from his signboard, for a sign :
There's not a graveyard in the land, but lo !
On the white tablets of the dead, full cut
Below their sacred names, his shameless name
Who carved the marble !

Is it not pitiful?

We are all actors, and all audience.

Yea, such a dreary farce we make our lives,

That something is expected of a man

Upon his deathbed: "Hark ye now, good friends,

These fine last words, this notable bravery,—see!"

So even the grim cross-bones of awful Death

Must take an attitude, and the skull smirk

For a last picture.

Here is a nation, too,

(God help it!) that dare scarcely act its mind,

But walks the world's stage, quaking with the thought,

"What will great England think of me for this?"

The poet scoffs at fame, then sets himself,

Full-titled, with a portrait at the front;

Each beautiful, impatient soul, who left

The world he scorned, still lingered near enough

To listen, not displeased, and hear the world

Admiringly relate how he had scorned it;

Even our great doubting Thomas, in young days

When he praised silence, did it with loud speech,

That ever too distinctly told, "'Tis I,
Thomas, so noisily abuse your noise !"

Is it not enough for the trumpet that the god
Has chosen it to sound his message through—
Must the brass blare in its own petty praise?
And can we never do the right, and do it
As though we were alone upon the earth,
And the gods blind?

XL

SUMMER AFTERNOON.

FAR in hollow mountain cañons
Brood, with purple-folded pinions,
Flocks of drowsy distance-colors on their nests ;
And the bare round slopes for forests
Have cloud-shadows, floating forests,
On their breasts.

Winds are wakening and dying,
Questions low with low replying,
Through the oak a hushed and trembling whisper
goes :
Faint and rich the air with odors,
Hyacinth and spicy odors
Of the rose.

Even the flowerless acacia
Is one flower—such slender stature,
With its latticed leaves a-tremble in the sun :
They have shower-drops for blossoms,
Quivering globes of diamond-blossoms,
Every one.

In the blue of heaven holy
Clouds go floating, floating slowly,
Pure in snowy robe and sunny silver crown ;
And they seem like gentle angels—
Leisure-full and loitering angels,
Looking down.

Half the birds are wild with singing,
And the rest with rhythmic winging
Sing in melody of motion to the sight ;
Every little sparrow twitters,
Cheerily chirps, and cheeps, and twitters
His delight.

Sad at heart amid the splendor,
Dull to all the radiance tender,
What can I for such a world give back again?
Could I only hint the beauty—
Some least shadow of the beauty,
Unto men !

XLI

WEATHER-BOUND.

THOU pitiless, false sea !
How, like a woman, thou wilt softly sigh
With heaving breast where bubble-jewels shine,
Or, beckoning, toss thy foam-white arms on high,
And laugh with those blue sunny eyes of thine !

Ah, crouching, creeping sea !
Thou tiger-cat ! how, while the winds make pause
To stroke thy long smooth back in quiet play,
Thou canst unsheathe thy velvet-hidden claws
And spring all unawares upon thy prey !

Thou treacherous, cruel sea !
How thou wilt show thy glittering smile at night,
Hiding thy fangs, hushing thy fiendish cry,
And rise all gentle sport from licking white
The bones of men that underneath thee lie !

O bitter, bitter sea !
Didst thou not fawn about my naked feet,
When I stood with thee on the beach, and say
That thou wouldst bear me swiftly home to meet
My darling, waiting there in vain to-day ?

Yea, thou most mighty sea !
Keep then that promise murmured on the shore ;
Put thy great shoulders to our loitering keel,
Not as in rage and wrath thou hast before—
Let the good ship thy help gigantic feel.

Thou answerest me, O sea !
Lifting in silence, o'er the waters stilled,
The shattered fragment of a rainbow fair,
A mocking promise, ne'er to be fulfilled,
Based on the waves and broken in mid-air.

XLII

TO CHILD SARA.

I LOOKED in a dew-drop's heart to-day
As it clung on a leaf of clover,
Holding a sparkle of starry light,
Like a liquid drop of opal bright
With diamond dusted over.

In that least globe of quivering dew,
The sunny scene around,
Diminished to a grass-blade's width—
Scarcely a fairy's finger-breadth—
All imaged there I found :

The spreading oak, the fir's soft fringe,
The grain-field's brightening green,
The linnet that flew fluttering by,
And, over all, the dear blue sky,
The bending boughs between :

And all the night, as from its nest
It gazes up afar,
Its bosom holds the heavens deep,
Whose constellations o'er it sweep,
And mirrors every star.

Child, is that drop of dew—your soul—
With mirrored heaven as bright?
(Forgive me that I ask of you,
Whose heart I know is pure and true
And stainless as the light :)

The sunshine, and the starlight too,—
Fair hope, and faith as fair,
Courage, and patience, silent power,
And wisdom for each troubled hour,—
Tell me, are they all there?

Your quiet grace, and kindly words
Have influence sweet and strong ;
Your hand and voice can calm the brain,
And cheer the heavy hearts of men
With music and with song :

Let the soul answer—can it give
That music clear and calm—
The rhythmic years, the holier aim,
The scorn of pleasure, fortune, fame—
To make our life a psalm ?

All round the house, your birthday morn
The budded orchards stand ;
And we can watch from every room
The trees all blushing into bloom—
Blossoms on every hand :

So may your Life be, many a year,
A fair and goodly tree ;
Not blossoming only, but sublime
With fruit, so hastening the time
When Earth shall Eden be.

XLIII

A FABLE.

TO CHILD ANNA.

ONE morning, in a Prince's park,
Before the rising of the lark
Or the first glimmering twilight beam,
A Lily blossomed by a stream ;
Just at the chilliest, darkest hour,
When frowning clouds in heaven lower,
When shadows crouch all gaunt and grim,
And every little star is dim.

“O dreary world !” the Lily sighed :
Only the dreary wind replied.

Soon, in the East uprising slow,
A cold gray dawn began to grow.
The Lily watched where all around
The mist came creeping o'er the ground,

And listened, while with sadder tone
The morning-wind began to moan :
But all the more the light drew on,
Her tear-dewed cheek was deathlier wan,—
Each streak of daylight, as it grew,
Revealed a world so strange and new.
Slowly the dawn crept up the sky
Like a cold, cruel, watching eye.
Once from some little wakened bird
A twittering note of joy she heard :
The chill dew fell upon her head—
She almost wished that she were dead ;
“There comes no joy for me,” she said.

A gnarled and wisdom-wrinkled Oak
Which overheard, in answer spoke :
“O foolish little Lilybell,
Why do you weep, when all is well ?
Look up ! Have faith ! For by-and-by
The sun is coming up the sky ;
All golden red the heavens will glow,
All golden green the earth below ;
The birds their rippling songs will sing,
And wooing winds their spices bring :
And then the Prince will hither come
To wander 'mid his flowers, and some,

(Ah, favored blossoms !) bending down,
He plucks and places in his crown.
Look up, O foolish Lilybell !
A little while, and all is well."

The Lily drooped and trembled still :
"The dawn," she sobbed, "is dim and chill ;
And if the Prince should come, alas !
He will not stoop among the grass ;
I surely cannot please his eyes,
For I am neither fair nor wise :
He'll choose some tall and stateiy tree,
He surely will not care for me !"

But now the sunrise was at hand,
Lighting with splendor all the land ;
As if a seraph stood below
With lifted pinions all aglow,
Whose tips of fire still nearer came
In feathery plumes of floating flame ;
While from his hidden face the rays
Shot up and set the heavens ablaze.
They warmed the old Oak's wrinkled face,
And touched it with a mellow grace ;
Then dancing downward to his feet
They kissed the Lily's face so sweet,

And laughed away her foolish fear
And lit a gem in every tear ;
Then flew to greet the Master's eye,
Who even now was drawing nigh.

He saw the Lily's fragile cup
With dew and sunlight brimming up,
And, as he marked each beauty well,
The petals pure as pearliest shell,
And on the lowly bending stem
The tear-drop sparkling like a gem,
The Prince was glad, and stooping down
Plucked it, and set it in his crown ;
And 'mid the jewels glittering there
None shone so royally and rare,
For none was half so pure and fair.

Dear child, 'tis our ingratitude,
And faithless fear, and sullen mood,
Darken a world so bright and good !
There's nothing beautiful and true—
There's not a rift of heaven's blue,
And not a flower, or dancing leaf,
But shames our selfish-hearted grief.
His hand that feels the sparrow's fall,
And builds the bee his castle-wall,

And spreads the tiniest insect's sail,
And tints the violet's purple veil,
Will never let His children stray
Or wander from His arms away.
To-day may seem all cold and dim—
Trust the To-morrow unto Him.
'Tis slander that we often hear—
“Hope whispers falsehoods in our ear,”—
There's no such lying voice as Fear.
Hope is a prophet sent from Heaven,
Fear is a false and croaking raven.
The dawn that buds all gray and cold
Will blossom to a sky of gold ;
God's love shall like a sunrise stay
To lighten all the future way—
Still brighter to the Perfect Day.

XLIV

THE CREATION.

A FOUNTAIN rusheth upward from God's
throne :

Its streaming stem we name Eternal Power :
Its tossing drops are worlds, that spin and fall,
While on their spheres our little human lives
Like gleams and shadows swiftly glance and go.

XLV

THE FIRST CAUSE.

DOUBTLESS the linnet, shut within its cage,
Thinks the fair child that loves it, brings it seed,
And hangs it, chirping to it, in the sun,
Is the preserver of its little world.

Doubtless the child, within her nursery walls,
Thinks her kind father is the father of all
Those happy children, chattering on the lawn—
Keeps yonder town as well as this bright room,
And pours the brook that sparkles past the door.

Doubtless we think the Being who made man,
The visible world, space powdered thick with stars,
The golden fruit whose core is curious life,
Created all things—love, and law, and death ;
Fate, the crowned forehead ; Will, the sceptred hand.

Perchance—perchance : yet need it be that He
Who planted us is the Head-gardener? What
If beyond Him rose rank on rank, as the bulb
Is higher than the crystals of its food,
And he who set it, higher than the flower,
And he that owns the garden, more than all?

The great Cause works through lesser ones ; permits
The plant to bear dead buds on dying stems ;
The beaver to weave dams that the stream snaps ;
The workman to make watches that lose time,
Or organ-pipes all jarred and out of tune.
Did not I build a playhouse for my boys,
And made it ill, and that loose plank fell down
And hurt the children? And did not I learn,
After three trials, how to make it well?
Know we the limit of the power He gives
To lesser Wills to will imperfectly?
Is earth that limit? Is the last link man,
Between the finite and the infinite?
When that new star flared out in heaven, and died,
Who knows what Spirit, failing in his plan,
Dashed out his work in wrath, to try anew?

O mother world ! we stammer at thy knee
Vainly our childish questions. 'Tis enough
For such as we to know, that on His throne,

Nearer than we can think, and farther off
Than any mind can fathom, sits the One,
And sees to it—though pain and evil come,
And all may not be good—that all is well.

XLVI

SEMELE.

WHAT were the garden-bowers of Thebes to
me?

What cared I for their dances and their feasts,
Whose heart awaited an immortal doom?

The Greek youths mocked me, since I shunned in
scorn

Them and their praises of my brows and hair.

The light girls pointed after me, who turned
Soul-sick from their unending fooleries.

Apollo's noon-glare wrathfully beat down

Upon the head that would not bend to him—

Him in his fuming anger!—as the highest.

In every lily's cup a venomous thing

Crooked up its hairy limbs; or, if I bent

To pluck a blue-eyed blossom in the grass,

Some squatted horror leered with motionless eyes.

I think the very earth did hate my feet,
And put forth thistles to them, since I loathed
Her bare brown bosom ; and the scowling pines
Menaced me with dark arms, and hissed their threats
Behind me, hurrying through their gloom, to watch
(Blurred in unsteady tears till all their beams
Dazzled, and shrank, and grew) that oval ring
Of shining points that rift the Milky-way,
Revealing, through their gap in the dusted fire,
The hollow awfulness of night beyond.

There came a change : a glory fell to me.
No more 'twas Semele, the lonely girl,
But Jupiter's Beloved, Semele.
With human arms the god came clasping me :
New life streamed from his presence ; and a voice,
That scarce could curb itself to the smooth Greek,
Now and anon swept forth in those deep nights,
Thrilling my flesh with awe ; mysterious words—
I knew not what ; hints of unearthly things
That I had felt on solemn summer noons,
When sleeping earth dreamed music, and the heart
Went crooning a low song it could not learn,

But wandered over it, as one who gropes
For a forgotten chord upon a lyre.

Yea, Jupiter ! But why this mortal guise,
Wooing as if he were a milk-faced boy ?
Did I lack lovers ? Was my beauty dulled,
The golden hair turned dross, the lithe limbs shrunk,
The deathless longings tamed, that I should seethe
My soul in love like any shepherd girl ?

One night he sware to grant whate'er I asked ;
And straight I cried—"To know thee as thou art !
To hold thee on my heart as Juno does !
Come in thy thunder—kill me with one fierce
Divine embrace !—Thine oath !—Now, Earth, at
last—!"

The heavens shot one swift sheet of lurid flame :
The world crashed : from a body scathed and torn
The soul leapt through, and found his breast, and died.

"Died?"—So the Theban maidens think, and
laugh,
Saying, "She had her wish, that Semele !"

But sitting here upon Olympus' height
I look down, through that oval ring of stars,
And see the far-off Earth, a twinkling speck—
Dust-mote whirled up from the Sun's chariot wheel—
And pity their small hearts that hold a man
As if he were a god ; or know the god—
Or dare to know him—only as a man !
—O human love, art thou forever blind ?

XLVII

A POET'S APOLOGY.

TRUTH cut on high in tablets of hewn stone,
Or on great columns gorgeously adorned,
Perchance were left alone,
Passed by and scorned ;
But Truth enchased upon a jewel rare,
A man would keep, and next his bosom wear.

So, many an hour, I sit and carve my gems—
Ten spoiled, for one in purer beauty set :
Not for kings' diadems—
Some amulet
That may be worn o'er hearts that toil and plod,—
Though but one pearl that bears the name of God.

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